

# Summer Food Service Program

**T**he Summer Food Service Program provides free, nutritious meals to school-aged children in low-income areas during school vacations. Locally, approved sponsors operate the program. They receive reimbursement for the meals they serve and their operating costs. Sponsors may be schools, units of local government, public or nonprofit private residential summer camps, other nonprofit private organizations, and colleges or universities participating in the National Youth Sports Program. Any child may receive a free meal at an approved open site without the need to apply.

## Program Access

- ☐ Do summer feeding sites currently serve low-income areas of your community? If not, can your community identify areas where these sites are needed?

A feeding site is the physical location where sponsors serve summer meals. A site can be a school, summer day camp, residential summer camp, park, community center, housing project, church, boys' and girls' clubs, YMCA, or migrant center. Most sponsors open summer feeding sites near a concentration of low-income children. A potential sponsor can approach local school districts to identify neighborhood schools where more than 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches. This information can help sponsors determine where to focus their efforts.

- ☐ Do feeding sites operate only during the summer months?

Despite its name, the Summer Food Service Program can operate year 'round in some places. Where schools operate on a 12-month school calendar, approved sites may serve meals at any time during the year when some portion of the student body is on a scheduled school break.

- ☐ Does your local school district sponsor a summer meal program at a neighborhood school or at a nearby location?



Schools are desirable sponsors for two reasons. They may have experience with the National School Lunch Program, which has similar meal requirements, and they may have local or central kitchen facilities, trained food service staff, and knowledge of sound nutrition principles.

- ☐ Are summer meals available at local recreation programs?

Many parks and recreation departments run summer programs for children but do not provide meal service. A school or other organization could collaborate with one of these departments to provide meals or open a feeding site for the children enrolled in a summer recreation program. Sites may have difficulty attracting participants solely for a meal, especially in rural areas where transportation may be problematic. Linking the summer program with a recreation or enrichment program can draw children and parents to the program and facilitate participation.

- ☐ Are organizations in small or rural communities participating?

In some small and remote areas, it may be difficult to gather a large enough group of children to support a cost-effective meal

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program. Consequently, a community lacking a high concentration of low-income children might have a difficult time finding a sponsor or a local site. Recently implemented policy allows for mobile feeding sites in such rural areas. Vehicles can dispense meals at qualified sites along rural routes. In many rural areas, a sponsor might have to deliver meals to multiple feeding sites or provide transportation for children in other programs to the summer feeding site.

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## Nutrition Education

- ☐ Do feeding sites offer high-quality, nutritious, safe meals?
- ☐ Do feeding sites offer nutrition education?

The nutritional well-being of children can be influenced by both the amount and the quality of the food they eat. Children are more likely to eat foods that appeal to all their senses. They are also more likely to eat foods that they know will help give them energy to grow and be healthy. The special circumstances in which summer meals are served raise the importance of attention to safe food handling, storage, and preparation.

The summer program can also offer children more than a nutritious, safe meal. It provides an opportunity to teach children about healthful eating and reinforce healthful food choices. Quality meals and meaningful nutrition education activities attract children and keep them coming back.

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## Cooperative Partnerships

- ☐ Do potential sponsors have access to meal preparation facilities or meal service providers?

Some potential sponsors do not have kitchen facilities to prepare meals. However, this need not deter participation in the summer food program. For example, sponsors can contract with meal service providers to prepare and deliver meals to their feeding sites. They can also lease kitchen space from another organization and prepare the meals themselves. Securing cost-beneficial meal service for its participants can be the determining factor in an organization's decision to sponsor a feeding site.

- ☐ Do smaller sponsors have collaborative agreements with other agencies to strengthen program and administrative efficiency?

Some smaller organizations may not have sufficient resources to administer the program on their own. These organizations can collaborate to provide summer meal service. For example, one organization might have administrative experience and sufficient staff but no food service experience or available kitchen space. Another might have an available site but insufficient personnel to operate the site. A third might have unused kitchen space and trained food service personnel but insufficient numbers of participants to justify running a meal service during the summer. If these three agencies joined forces, they could provide meal service to their clients in a cost-effective manner.

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## SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Contact your local school district to see if it participates in the summer food program. If so, identify which neighborhoods are under-served. If not, encourage it to participate in the program.
- Determine the number of schools in your community where at least half the students enrolled are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. Where those schools don't offer the summer food program, identify agencies that can offer this service.
- Contact State education agencies to encourage a Statewide campaign to promote school participation in the summer food program.
- Encourage potential local sponsors to participate in the summer food program and operate feeding sites in under-served areas.
- Encourage sponsors to reach out to families so that they know of the availability of the Summer Food Service Program.
- In rural communities, identify ways to provide transportation for the children from summer enrichment programs to a central feeding site or deliver meals to multiple sites.
- Work or volunteer at a summer program site for the benefit of your community.

### FNS CAN HELP:

- More information on the Summer Food Service Program is available at [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd).
- The Summer Food Service Program can make a difference to children in your community. [A Guide to the Summer Food Service Program](#) will show you how. Check out [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd) to see for yourself. You will also find a variety of important tips to help make your Summer Food Service Program a success.